NOTORIOUS 1950s EC COMICS!

JOLTING TALES OF TENSION IN THE EC TRADITION!

SHOCK SUSPENSE STORIES

NO. 15 MAR

CANADA

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Often, during the long, dark night, the halls of the psychiatric ward would ring and echo suddenly with his scream. It was a screech of terror, of mental agony, from a poor, lost soul wandering in a bleak mental purgatory. His ear-splitting yell would frighten the other patients behind their doors, and even the night nurses would be startled out of their cold trained calm. Yet it was no maniacal gabble, no lunatic chant, this shriek in the night. It was always the same three words—the same three words that burst the hospital silence with their quivering reverberations...

There was no use trying to soothe the tortured screamer down. The nurses had soon learned that a hypodermic filled with the correct amount of an effective sedative soon sent him back into a drugged moaning, tossing sleep. There he goes again, agress. You take him this time, huh? Room 212! Gregg Bolton... Lord, if he keeps this up, I'll go out of my mind!

There was no use trying to soothe the tortured screamer down. The nurses had soon learned that a hypodermic filled with the correct amount of an effective sedative soon sent him back into a drugged moaning, tossing sleep. There! He's been like this ever since they brought him in. For out... three weeks...screaming like that...yelling those three words. Will Dr. Swanson even start curing him?
But for Dr. Allen Swanson, Gregg Bolton was one of his most difficult psychiatric patients. The doctor had tried every therapy at his disposal to end the poor man's continuous raving, including insulin shock and electric shock...

But nothing had helped. The nightly screaming continued, and all of the doctor's efforts to make Gregg talk, to unburden his tormented mind, led only to the same three words...

I HATE HER...

Gregg, you must try to listen to me...try to answer me. Who do you hate? Who?

Finally, in desperation, Dr. Swanson called in a consultant...Dr. John Peabody...

I need your advice, John. It's this Bolton case. I can't seem to break through to him. He's getting progressively worse...

HMmmm! I see you've given him the works. What's his clinical history, Allen?

He's the sole survivor of a plane crash in the Pacific...a luxury airliner bound for Hawaii. Halfway there, the plane went down in flames, and sank. Out of 45 passengers, he alone was found, floating at sea in a small rubber raft, after five weeks...

Poor chap! That's enough to unhinge any mind.

There's more, John! One of the registered passengers was his wife! She was his bride! They were on their honeymoon! They'd been married less than six hours when the plane went down...six short hours...

Sad! He obviously suffered a severe mental trauma brought about by intense grief plus the strain of the experience itself...drifting alone for five weeks thinking of his lost happiness...his love snatched from him. Symptoms, of course, are deep depression, suicidal tendencies...hysteria?

Yes...plus one odd factor, John. One thing I can't fit in:

In his night-mares and in our talks, he consistently shouts the same three words, 'I hate her!' Whom could he be talking about?

HMmmm certainly not his bride perhaps someone else on the plane? Perhaps...Allen, we've got to pin it down! We've got to break through for a decent interrogation! I suggest we use Amytal!
Maximum dosage of sodium amytal, the popularly-known 'truth-drug,' with its power to release deep barriers within the sick mind, allowing its troubles to pour out, was injected into the patient but only the three words erupted from Gregg Bolton's lips.


The older psychiatrist spoke slowly, with the distilled wisdom of long experience in dealing with 'out-of-order' human minds...

Sometimes we tangle ourselves in wrongly-complexities when simplicities are the right answer. That trite saying... Love is close to hate... Might fit Gregg. Keep him talking. Give him another 'cos!

Dr. Swanson looked at Dr. Peabody.

LINDA? His bride? How could he hate the girl he'd just married? It doesn't make sense, John! It doesn't even make the right kind of nonsense for a psychiatrist unless it's inverted wording... Disguised true feeling...

The second dose took dramatic effect, suddenly opening the flood-gates, letting the pent-up poisons pour forth...

Tell us, Gregg! Tell us why you hate Linda! Tell us the whole story!

LINDA? I... I met her three months ago at a party. Sweet lovely Linda...

Our first burning kiss sealed our love forever. It was a tender love, passionate, divine. We loved until we ached with an infinite joy that nearly burst our hearts...

'Beautiful gracious Linda, we were introduced... We danced... We fell in love... It was lightning fast. Neither of us had any doubt... From the very first moment...

LINDA, I'VE KNOWN YOU ALL MY LIFE... LONGER!

YES, GREGG! WE MET A BILLION YEARS AGO!

Darling... Darling... OH, GREGG...
Funny how convention rules us. Only my sense of propriety made me wait a decent interval. A month... before whispering the age-old worn words that rang for us with a magic wonder and newness...

MARRY ME, LINDA? BE MY WIFE...

OH, YES, GREGG! YES, YES, YES...

No love more sublime ever existed in this crazy world of ours. She was everything to me! More than life! How could I tell you? Linda was... she was... uh... she...

But then, as the effect of the amytal wore off, Gregg's face suddenly contorted. His body wilted. His fists clenched. And from loving tenderness, his voice changed to a harsh sneer...

LINDA? I HATE HER! I HATE HER! PUZZLING! VERY PUZZLING!

The two psychiatrists struggled with their raging, screaming patient, forcing him back down upon the pillow...

That's all the amytal we can risk giving him today, John. I'll hold him! You'd better give him a sedative!

Puzzling... his complete reversal of feelings...

They stood in the hall outside the patient's room, listening to his tired cries fade...

I HATE HER... I HATE HER... WELL, JOHN? IS THIS ONE A CORNER OR ISN'T IT? ONE MINUTE TELLING US OF HIS HEAVENLY LOVE FOR LINDA... THE NEXT MOMENT SCREAMING THAT!

Something must have happened later on in his story, Allen. I'll be back tomorrow. We'll give him another amytal shot.

Early the next morning, the truth-drug launched Gregg further into his story. The two psychiatrists listened closely...

We were married soon after, and Linda was mine... all mine! After the wedding party, we had no time to be alone! Our plane... our honeymoon plane... was waiting to take us to Hawaii. We rushed directly to the airport...

It was torture being so close to Linda. She was mine and yet I could not have her...

Only a few more hours, darling... and then we'll be there... Hawaii... the Royal Palms Hotel... alone... at last!

The Honeymoon Suite! Oh, darling... alone!
Neither of us realized how those words would come true in a different and horrifying way, for them... Oh, God... I'll never forget... One engine started to cough and sputter. The stewardess tried to reassure us...

"Don't ask me how Linda and I escaped. My mind is a complete blank. All I remember is that somehow we got out through the emergency exit door beside our seats before the plane went down, and there was an emergency life-raft inflating itself from its attached bottle of compressed gas."

"We plummeted seaward, like a meteor leaving a smoking screaming trail...."

"The plane was a funeral pyre, floating and burning, cremating its passengers for their watery grave. Screams... dying shrieks and moans... the greedy burble and hiss of the mountainous waves... it was all a hellish confused madness...."

"I don't even remember climbing aboard the raft or pulling Linda in after me. When we came out of our dazed shock, we realized..."

"I don't even remember climbing aboard the raft or pulling Linda in after me. When we came out of our dazed shock, we realized..."

"And then our happy words came back to haunt us with their new horrible meaning..."

"Oh, Lord..."
GREGG PAUSED IN HIS NARRATIVE, THE BITTERNESS
OF THAT MOMENT IN HIS MEMORY ETCHED IN HIS PAIN-
LINED FACE, THE TWO PSYCHIATRISTS EXCHANGED SI-
GNIFICANT GLANCES, WHISPERING...

SO LINDA SURVIVED THE PLANE CRASH WITH HIM! AN UNEXPECTED
TURN! WE HAD ASSUMED, SINCE HE WAS PICKED UP ALIVE IN THE
RAFT, THAT HE WAS THE SOLE SUR-
VIVOR. BUT... WHAT HAPPENED
TO HER? WHAT HAPPENED TO LINDA?

'WE WERE ALIVE, YES, BUT WHAT
TORTURE... WHAT REFINED, EXQUISITE
TORTURE, THAT TINY RUBBER RAFT...
OUR "NUPTIAL SUITE"... OUR MONEY-
MOON "IDYLL"!

OH, LIRDA, LIRDA, MY POOR DARLING. COLD, WET, SHIVERING, MISERABLE...
HERE, INSTEAD OF IN A COZY HOTEL,
WARMED BY OUR LOVE... SOb. SOb

'AND AFTER THE FOG, WHEN SEARCH FLARES HAD GIVEN
UP AND NO LONGER COMBED THE AREA, THE SUN BEGAN TO
BEAT DOWN UNEARTHLY, THIRST WAS A PARALYZING
FIRE IN OUR THROATS. HUNGER JOINED FORCES WITH
THIRST, GNAWING AT OUR INSIDES. WE HAD SNATCHED NOT
EVEN A CRUMB FROM THE WRECK.'

GREGG! GREGG, I'M STARVING!

HUSH! HE'S GOING ON...

FOURTY THREE PEOPLE... BURNED... DROWNED...

'WE PUT THE TRAGEDY OUT OF OUR MINDS. THERE WAS
NOTHING WE COULD DO FOR THEM. ALL THAT MATTERED,
REALLY, WAS THAT WE WERE ALIVE... AND WE HAD TO
STAY ALIVE.'

IT'S RAINING, LINDA! IT'S RAINING!
DRINK! DRINK ALL YOU CAN. THERE'S
NO TELLING HOW LONG WE'LL DRIFT
BEFORE WE'RE RESCUED.

'RIP IT APART, LINDA! RIP IT APART.
DON'T WASTE A DROP! DON'T EVEN THE GUTS...

WE'D JUST ABOUT GIVEN UP WHEN A FLYING FISH
BLUNDERED ABOARD OUR RAFT AND WE FOUNDED UPON IT
WITH ANIMAL GROWLS.

RAW... BUT... GOOD... DELICIOUS...
But after the fish... nothing. Not a bite... except for the few handfuls of plankton I managed to scoop up with my hands. Maggots ate my soul as I watched my beloved grow thinner and thinner, wasting away.

LINDA BABY

SO... HUNGRY, GREGG. SO HUNGRY! AND NO SHIP, NO PLANE. IT’S HOPELESS.

THE FEVER... THE THIRST... THE HUNGER. NAILS GNAWING AWAY IN OUR GUTS... THE ETERNITIES STRAINING TO SEE A SHIP ON THE HORIZON, A PLANE IN THE VAST BLUE ABOVE... THEY COULD NOT STOP US FROM HOLDING EACH OTHER... WARMING OURSELVES WITH OUR LOVE EACH COLD BITTER NIGHT...

SO... HUNGRY, GREGG. SO HUNGRY! AND NO SHIP, NO PLANE. IT’S HOPELESS.

WHAT HAPPENED TO LINDA? CAN’T YOU GUESS, DOCTOR? DAY AFTER ENDLESS DAY... SITTING THERE... OPPOSITE ME... UNDER THE SHINING SUN... STARVING... STARVING! SHE STARTED TO BABBLE... TO RAVE... TO GO OUT OF HER MIND. SHE SAW THINGS THAT WEREN’T THERE... HEARD THINGS.

NEAR IT, GREGG? IT’S A PLANE! THERE IT IS! THERE! WAVE TO IT, GREGG. MAKE THEM SEE US.

NEAR IT, GREGG? IT’S A PLANE! THERE IT IS! THERE! WAVE TO IT, GREGG. MAKE THEM SEE US.

THEIR LOVE WAS UNSHAKABLE. STEADFAST. UTTERLY IMPERVIOUS TO ANYTHING. TO THE LAST, LINDA LOVED ME... AND I LOVED LINDA!

GREGG! WHEN YOU WERE PICKED UP, YOU WERE ALONE? WHAT HAPPENED TO LINDA?

LINDA... SOS... MY LINDA...

THIRST MUST HAVE MADE HER DRINK SEA WATER WHEN I WASN’T LOOKING! BEFORE MY EYES, IN THOSE LAST DAYS, I WATCHED MY LOVE WHITE... AND SCREAM IN AGONY... AND SAG... AND WRETCH... AND COUGH UP BILE... AND FINALLY, MERCIFULLY, DIE.

LINDA... SOS... MY LINDA...
There was a hushed moment following. A tear stole down Gregg’s face. There was a warm look in his eyes... a far away look. His lips twisted into a half-smile. Doctor Swanson bent forward, impatient for him to go on...

But then... when did you begin to hate her, Gregg? What happened? Leave him alone, Allen!

Dr. Swanson shook Gregg. Gregg’s eyes darkened. His face grew taut... ashen. He shuddered, he screamed...

I hate her! Blast it! He’s gone off again! I’ll give him another... 5ccs...

Don’t bother, Allen!

Dr. Swanson stood up! He turned to Dr. Peabody...

I hate her! Listen to him! We’ll never know what happened if I don’t give him...

There’s no need for another shot, Allen! I know what happened!

You know? You know why he changed... why his love changed to hate?

His love never changed! The mind is a strange thing, Allen... yours... mine! Memory-association sometimes tricks us. We hear what we want to hear. Sometimes we hear wrong!

Hear wrong, John?

The man was alive after five weeks in a life raft, Allen. How could a man stay alive with no provisions... no water for five weeks?

I hate her!

He’s not saying ‘hate’, Allen! Listen closely! He’s telling you what he did after Linda died! He’s telling how he stayed alive!

Good Lord!

The End
The train wafted away, clattering into the night, and he stood in the fluid blackness of the drenched Railroad Station. The noise of the departing Limited faded, and the silence closed in, and he suddenly felt the tenseness of the town... the anger that seethed within it. Men milled about him with fire in their eyes and curses on their lips, shrugging and talking quietly and eying him suspiciously. He pulled his black hat down around his face, tightened his black scarf, turned up his black overcoat collar, and started past them... past the men with the guns in their pockets and the clubs in their hands and the anger in their hearts.

He felt their hate and their anger and he did not linger to ask more questions but turned and entered the station waiting room. There were more men there, gathered around the pot-bellied stove... more men with guns and clubs and quiet voices and suspicious eyes...

He'd be crazy to try and take a train out! I say he's holed up in town... just let him show his face... just let him come out to eat... I beg your pardon, but... is there a taxi?...
They looked at him... peered beneath his black hat brim into his eyes... studied his hollow-cheeked face... his thin-line mouth...

You're a stranger! You just get in on that train? Yes! I was wondering if I could get a taxi?

One of the men with a club stepped forward...

I've got a cab outside where you goin'? I've got the address right here!

The taxi cab driver led the stranger out of the station, waiting room into the liquid darkness again. It was raining harder now...

You got relatives? One of my children...

The cab driver opened the door to his cab and started the motor...

Well, when you get to your kid's house, stay there! I know! I've been warned! A lot of trigger-happy guys are roamin' the streets these nights...

The cab leaped ahead into the downpour, swinging out of the station parking lot...

Yeah! We're looking for someone! We're looking for someone real hard...

The bus station's just like this... and all the roads leading out of town. Everything's being watched...

The cab driver peered at his rider through the rear-view mirror...

Oh! Looking for someone?

We don't know who! We don't know his name! All we know is what he looks like and that he was a stranger in town...

And that he's a murderer!
The Stranger in Black leaned forward... Did you say... murder? The guy we're looking for killed a nineteen year old girl.

The cab driver chuckled... Hey! I'm driving and I don't know where I'm going! Oh, I'm sorry! Take me to 155 Grove Street.

The cab driver's eyes narrowed... 155 Grove of you sure you got the right address? Why yes, that's what it says. 155 Grove! Something wrong?

The cab driver shrugged... Nothing's wrong! It's just that 155 Grove Street is in the worst section of town! You said your kid...

...He...he's been... down on his luck lately! I've come to... help him out!

The gleaming wet taxi moved through the black downpour, up deserted shimmering streets that harbored only the reflections of their own street lamps. From time to time a group of men moved in and out of the headlight beam... more men with guns and clubs and anger... You...you have quite a posse organized...

...and when you find him, he'll have a fair trial, of course... Trial, nothing. We'll hang him from the nearest tree...

You mean you'd lynch him? Without...

He's a killer, ain't he? He picked up one of the sweetest gals in this town old Jeb Barker's daughter... took her down by the river... and... then he murdered her! Yeah! We'd lynch him you're darn right! The minute we get our hands on him!
The cab stopped before an old run-down structure housing a dirty-looking bar with two broken-windowed floors above. The stranger stepped out of the cab and paid the fare...

You sure this is the place you wanted?

Yes! This is it! 155! Thank you very much!

The cab driver watched the man in black cross the sidewalk to the bar, peer in, then turn to the door leading to the apartments above...

Something fishy about this? What's a swell-dressed guy like him want in a joint like that?

The cab driver gunned the engine of his taxi and sped off into the watery night...

The stranger stood before the battered door of the apartment corresponding to the number in the letter in his hand. He knocked softly...

Who...who's there?

Who...jimmy your...

The stranger stepped into the musty interior of the old building and climbed the squeaking stairs...

The cab swung around the corner and squealed to a stop. The driver stepped out...

He walked back up the block to the building with the shabby bar where he'd dropped the stranger. He hesitated a moment at the door to the apartments above...

The cab driver watched the man in black cross the sidewalk to the bar, peer in, then turn to the door leading to the apartments above...

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The cab stopped before an old run-down structure housing a dirty-looking bar with two broken-windowed floors above. The stranger stepped out of the cab and paid the fare...

You sure this is the place you wanted?

Yes! This is it! 155! Thank you very much!
Then he darted up the alley to the rear of the building...
The one light streaming into the downpour showed the cab driver his objective. He swung himself up onto the fire-escape ladder...

...and stealthily climbed up into the right until he could see into the illuminated room...

The stranger was there, all right...sitting on a bed...his coat, hat, and scarf beside him...his back to the window. But there was someone else in the room with the stranger. Another man, and the cab driver's blood surged angrily through his veins...

They were whispering together, the stranger and the man an entire town was looking for. The killer was crying softly and talking earnestly to the stranger. And the stranger was patting his shoulder and comforting him. Outside, on the fire-escape, the taxi driver swore...

It's him! It's the guy we're looking for! The murderer!

The men around the pot-bellied stove in the station froze, like wax statues, as the cabbie came in, shouting...

G'mon! I've found him! I've found our killer! He's holed up over on Grove Street. That stranger that came to town led me to him! G'mon!

Let's go!

They poured from the station waiting room with clubs and guns and angry faces. Car doors slammed. Curses rang into the night. Engines roared...

Follow me! Stop off at the bus depot! Get the rest of the boys!
Cars flashed through the liquid night. Men shouted to other men. More cars joined. Little groups patrolling the streets on the way were picked up. A roaring, screaming confusion of auto engines and squealing brakes converged on the shabby bar on Grove Street.

Heavy footsteps pounded up stairs that squealed their aged wooden objections. Snarling voices filled the musty structure...

SOMEBODY COVER THE BACK!
JUST DOWN THE DOOR!
ONE SIDE!

The old battered door released its weak hold on its hinges and crashed inward, and the angry men poured through...

WHERE IS HE?!
WHERE'D HE GO?

The stranger in black stood alone before the intruders, calmly buttoning his overcoat...

HE'S GONE!
WHERE'D HE GO, BLAST YOU!

The stranger smiled out from beneath his black hat... a thin-lipped, sad smile...

I... CAN'T TELL YOU!
WHO IS HE? WHAT'S HIS NAME?

The stranger shook his head...

The stranger started toward the door...

I CAN'T TELL YOU THAT, EITHER! I CAN'T TELL YOU ANYTHING!
YOU'LL TELL US WHERE HE WENT IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU!

START TALKING!
I'M SORRY! DON'T ASK ME ANYTHING ABOUT HIM. I HAVEN'T THE RIGHT TO DIVULGE WHAT I KNOW.

YOU'LL TALK! WE'LL MAKE YOU TALK!
GRAB HIM!
Fists struck out. Fists with fury and anger and frustration behind them...

Talk, blast you! Talk! Don’t! I can’t!

Someone struck out with a club. Someone kicked hard. The tight-lipped mouth remained sealed...

Give it to him good! Make him talk! Make him!

Talk? Tell his name... where he went! Tell us!

I can’t!

Their frustrations at just missing their quarry poured down upon this stranger in black because he would not help them, would not give them the information they sought. Clubs. Gun-butts. Brass-knuckles... all found their mark until...

He ain’t moving. He’s dead!

HOLD IT!

He lay in a bloody beaten heap upon the floor. The stranger. Beside him lay a white piece of paper. Clean and pure white. Someone picked it up.

What’s it say?

It says, “Dear father, I need you! I have done a terrible thing! I have sinned and I want to confess! Please come to...”

Good lord? He... he couldn’t tell us! He... choke... couldn’t?

They held him with his arms behind his back. Someone knocked off his hat. Someone else slapped his face... savagely...

They’d searched for days, these men. They’d hounded the killer, itching for revenge, hungry for his blood, seething with hate and leaped with the excitement of inflicting punishment. These were righteous men on a righteous cause, and no one could stand in their way. They pounded and kicked and punched...

OOOOP! UUUNN! Talk! Tell us! Let me...

Someone knelt and pulled the black scarf from the dead man’s neck, slowly opened the black overcoat. His stiff white collar was just beginning to absorb the blood that oozed from his tight-upped mouth...

He lay in a bloody beaten heap upon the floor, the stranger. Beside him lay a white piece of paper, clean and pure white. Someone picked it up.

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Good lord? He... he couldn’t tell us! He... choke... couldn’t?

The end.
He had met her at a Gala Dance, wherein had gathered the employees of the Hofstetter Pig Iron Factory. For weeks before, since he first noticed her in Accounts Payable, Marvin Bindlestiff had eyes for no one but the slim blue-eyed girl with the upswept blond hair. Silently Marvin had gazed at her. Silently he had yearned to meet the young woman named Desire Flinch. But Marvin was a resilient young man; introducing himself brusquely was not to be considered. That's why the Gala Dance was such a godsend. True, he hadn't actually danced with her, but he had escorted her home in the darkness of the night they strolled side-by-side, and Marvin's heart had nearly burst through his best white-on-white shirt with desire for Desire. For a fleeting moment he had even entertained the brazen idea of holding her hand. But it was enough, Marvin mused, just to meet her!

A week later, after he had dined and danced with her at Ye Vealburger Valhallaand at the Riding & Riveting Club. Marvin made up his mind. Donning his newest sack suit, he set his stiff straw hat at an aggressive angle and, his courage screwed up, set out for the Flinch home. The worst that could happen, he mused, was for elderly Mr. Flinch to say NO when Marvin revealed that his intentions toward Desire were marital.

The slim girl, herself, answered the door-bell, her flashing smile lit the way to the parlor, where her daddy sniffed over the ships' arrival column of the evening paper. With a demure grin Desire stepped out in the room, leaving the two men to their conversation. The way she had smirked told Marvin that her answer, at any rate, was an emphatic YES!

Heart beating wildly, Marvin plunged into the object of his visit. His prospects in Pig Iron were good—he neither drank, smoked nor cursed. He had a tidy boodle stashed away in the local bank. That was why he considered himself worthy of asking Desire's hand in marriage.

Old Mr. Flinch arose, muttering over and over to himself. "The lad wants her hand, eh? It's her hand he's come for, is it?"

Marvin held his breath while Mr. Flinch crossed the room, opened the double-doors, and called for his daughter. Marvin's heart ascended to his throat while the girl entered and glanced coyly at him.

"The young man has come to ask for your hand, daughter," the older man intoned. "What do you say?"

Without a moment's hesitation Desire smiled openly at Marvin. Her left hand circled her right wrist and, with a quick movement, twisted energetically. Marvin Bindlestiff's mouth gaped awkwardly. Desire had unscrewed her right hand and was offering the realistic prosthetic appliance to him.

"You have what you came for," the old man said kindly, as Marvin stared at the artificial hand he had been offered. "When you wish to ask for something else, feel free to make the request!"

And with that, Mr. Flinch snorted and went back to reading the ships' arrival column in the evening paper.
FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD!

Go ahead, Marty! Finish the job! You've got to now! KILL HER! Tighten your fingers around her soft white throat! SQUEEZE! TIGHTER! TIGHTER! Squeeze till you choke off her screams! Squeeze till she stops clawing at you. Squeeze till her lungs stop heaving and her eyes roll back, blind white, and her CURVACIOUS body goes limp.

All right, Marty. It's done. You can stop now. You're just squeezing the neck of a corpse, now. She's dead. Well, don't just stand there looking stupid! You've just committed murder. You've got to get out of here, but fast...

Yeah! Got to get away before somebody comes along! Got to...

That's it, Marty! Run! Run from the scene of the crime! Run from your sickening filthy deed! You're safe, Marty! No witnesses! No one to talk! No one to... to... wait! What's that, Marty? What are you saying?...

I KILLED HER! I KILLED MILLIE BELSON! I KILLED...
Sure you had to, Marty boy! Hatch? Of course! Certainly! What else could you do? Especially considering the circumstances... shifting into that bar earlier this evening, looking for some fun for a change. Tired of being cooped up in that lousy hotel room. This looks like a quiet place. Hmm. Nice babe... giving me the eye, too.

You were clever, Marty! You were no dope. Your name had been in every paper in town a few weeks ago. You were careful not to use it.

Er... Joe Smith? I'm from out of town. Two more of those, bartender...

But that was an idiotic mistake, wasn't it, Marty? Flashing that roll of bills? You didn't notice how Millie started looking over... You didn't notice that sign of recognition in her face. You drank and she drank... You laughed and she laughed... and when she asked you that exciting question... how'd you like to take me home, Martin?

I'd been a long time, eh, Marty? A long time of hiding out. A long time without a drink. A long time without someone like her. So you wasted no time. You saw your chance and you grabbed at it. You've always done that, haven't you, Marty?...

Sure. Handsome! Sit down! I got the evening to kill! My name's Millie... Millie Belson. What's yours?

Hello, Honey! You look lonesome. Mind if a lonesome guy joins you? Can I buy you the next one?

You were clever, Marty! You were no dope. Your name had been in every paper in town a few weeks ago. You were careful not to use it.

One sixty? Take it out of this!

But that was an idiotic mistake, wasn't it, Marty? Flashing that roll of bills? You didn't notice how Millie started looking over...

One sixty? Take it out of this!

Say, mister! What's your middle name... well-heel'd?

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I'm a murderer! To protect myself. I had to...

Shut up, Marty! Don't say those things! Somebody will hear you! What? You're not saying those things? Well you heard it, didn't you? You heard that accusing voice inside your brain now, don't you... screaming louder... louder...

I strangled her! I murdered her with my own bare hands! I killed...

That's the way, Marty! Argue with that stupid squealing voice. Answer it back! Explain! Shut it up...

I'm a murderer! I had to... to protect myself. I had to...
What an idiotic fool you were! You fell right into her trap. She wasn’t letting you take her home. She wasn’t taking you anywhere. She just wanted to take you... That’s what I thought, “Joe.” You answered to “Martin” without batting an eyelash! You’re Martin Bordman, the embezzler! Why... I... I... There was no use stammering around, Marty. No use wishing you hadn’t taken a chance and crawled out of your hole before it had all blown over. She’d recognized you! You were trapped... I like you, Marty... so I won’t be greedy! The papers said you got away with forty grand... Gold cash! Only twenty-five grand will keep my soft sweet lips shut... Why you cheap chiseling sneak! All my planning... risking my neck... sweating blood... and you want to cut yourself in for more than half. You! A tramp! A crumb I met only an hour ago... wait! Keep away! We can bargain... Surely, Marty! Like you said, you had to do it; you had to protect yourself... had to cover up one crime with another. But this other thing! This voice echoing in your brain... this maddening voice, you didn’t figure on... I killed a woman! I killed Millie Belson! She’s back there in an alley dead! I’m a murderer! Shut up! Shut up! I killed... I killed... I killed... For god’s sake, Marty! He’s staring at you. He hears! He hears that crazy screaming voice in your brain... Choke... no! It can’t be! I’m a killer! Listen! I murdered... Somebody’s coming, Marty! And that voice won’t be still. Careful, now! Compose yourself! Put on a poker face! That’s it! There! You look like an average man out for a stroll...
Of course it can't be, Marty! It's ridiculous! How could anybody hear a voice that's in your own mind? Impossible! Of course! Certainly! But why is he staring at you?... Do I look... I am guilty? Say... Guilty! I... I killed! Mister... I killed!

Run, Marty! Run! He does hear you! Run...

I'm a murderer! I'm a murderer!

Run, Marty! Run some more! Run from yourself! Run from your vile deed and your screaming conscience...

Aw, come on, Marty! This is childish! This is uncanny! How can anyone hear your own guilty conscience? Now wait awhile! Let's think this over... That man... looking in that store window...

There! He's left far behind! Blow down! Walk! Watch the passersby! Watch their faces. Here comes one! He won't hear! He can't! He...

Oh... I'm guilty! Listen, mister! You ought to...

Now you're talking, kid! Let's be sure! Let's make the acid test. Stand beside him. Look into the window. See if he hears. See...

I throttled a woman! I killed her in cold blood! I'm a murderer! I...

He does hear! He must hear! They all hear! See how he spins around, staring at you in wide-eyed horror.

Good Lord, mister... keep away!
It's true, Marty! Your guilty mind is betraying you. Screaming out for all to hear... Branding you as a killer. Your lips are sealed tight but the voice of your conscience is loud and clear...

Run! Run away! But, where? Where can you run? That voice is with you always. Now you've had it! Look who's coming! A cop! He'll hear...he'll hear for sure...

Lord! What'll I do? What...

That's the boy, Marty! Quick thinking, kid... Covering up by hanging on the pole and singing in that loud nauseating baritone voice, drowning out the other...


All right! Move along before I run you in... and quiet down...

Smart boy, Marty! The din in this place certainly will drown out that gabbling confession pouring from your conscience's big fat mouth. Go ahead in...

WHHEW... WHAT NOISE!

You start across the noisy factory floor toward the office. The hammering thunders around you! And then suddenly... the hammering stops. The din subsides...

WHAT THE...?

Listen to that hideous heavenly racket... that ear-splitting perpetual hammering and clanging! It's music, isn't it, Marty? You can hardly hear that voice now! This is the place to be, all right...

Now, where's the office? Oh, yes. There it is...
And that voice... that crazy idiotic stupid voice screams out through the silence...

I killed a girl... Millie Belson! I strangled her! I'm a murderer!

And they look at you... the workers, they stare at you... they come toward you silently...

All right! All right!
I admit it! I'm a killer!
I'm a murderer!

The silence, Marty! The silence! It's still there! You don't even hear your own voice...

I'm Martin Bordman! I'm wanted by the police! And I just strangled a Millie Belson! You'll find her body in an alley...

You can't stand it any longer. You open your mouth... scream out your confession... watch their surprised expressions change in the silence...

You don't even hear your own confession! And the noises of the factory, Marty! They didn't stop! You didn't have to spill your secret! You didn't have to...

I'm deaf! Oh, Lord... I'm deaf! What's going on?

You don't hear the reason why everybody stared at you, Marty! It wasn't because anyone heard your conscience! That was inside you...

It's a policeman, Marty. You see him, but you don't hear his voice... you don't hear the boiler factory workers tell him...

A couple of us seen him come in! We took one look at him and started toward him...

And he started screamin' he killed this dame...

All we wanted to do was tell him he ought to take care of those scratches on his face... they look pretty bad...

Scratches on your face, Marty! Millie's clawing had done it! You were bleeding! That's what everybody was staring at! Marty, Marty, do you hear?
You stand, unable to move, gawking in horror at the ghastly nightmarish scene before you... Your wife's body, torn by a dozen bloody wounds... Her startled attacker caught in the act of stuffing her purse into his pocket... The ugly blade in his hand, red-wet and gleaming. Your dazed mind fights against this god-awful reality... Fights to believe it will soon awaken from what is only a harrowing dream... That your Mary... lovely, blue-eyed, raven-haired Mary... will be alive again, and smiling again, instead of lying pale and still before you. But this is no dream... This is too real to deny. Mary is there... Her raven-hair matted with dried blood... Her blue eyes staring emptily at the cold, white ceiling. And you choke the words...

You you dirty filthy murderer...

You dirty filthy murderer...

All right? Don't come any closer! I'll use this on you if I have to...

Six years a cop, Tom Gibson, and you've seen it all before. You've seen the victim. You've pictured the intruder coming in—robbing, being surprised, then brutal murder. You've gotten sick over it... gotten mad. But it never hit home before. Not like this. Not like seeing Mary there with her killer standing over her, it starts a screeching, pounding, white-hot hate rampaging through every nerve in your body, and you reach for your service revolver, cursing...

You scum! You rotten @##!@##!

He sees that deadly hate in your face... in your burning eyes. He sees the familiar movement, whirls, and plunges through the bedroom window. The shock of shattering glass restores your reflexes, a hoarse cry rars from your parched lip...

Stop! Stop or I'll shoot!
Your 38 barks, and a steel slug screams past the killer's ear. He stumbles, goes sprawling. You spring through the broken window without feeling the jagged pane claw at your flesh.

You kick him. Again and again, you drive your heavy shoe where it hurts most, and while he's doubled up and writhing in agony, you kick some more...

No more... gasp! Please! gasp... no... more...

Oh, Lord... please... stop

Fury! Blinding uncontrolled! You tear at his hair, pounding his head against the ground... against the ground... against...

Shoot me... for... God's sake! Get it... over...

And then the fury subsides. Not the hate! Not the lust for revenge! The blinding fury to torture and inflict pain subsides. You stand over him... Tom Gibson... Detective... drenched in your own sweat... panting... knowing that the rest is up to the law...

By... God... I'll see you burn!

You're a cop, Tom Gibson. A good cop! You go by the book. You know the book says your job is to make the pinch. So you drag the broken heap of a man to a lamppost and you hang his wrists around it. Then you frisk him. You find his name on some papers and you spit the name out...

Mike Ferris! Well, I'm going to watch you burn, Mike Ferris!

You go back into your house without looking at Mary, and you dial headquarters like the book says...

Hello... Crime Homicide... Sergeant Wallace? Hello? This is Gibson... at 214 Elm. Get the coroner and the morgue wagon down here. Yeah! Yeah, Bill! My... son... my wife...
You wait and they come. You re-live the nightmare for Sgt. Wallace, your best friend, droning on in a matter-of-fact monotone about a man who broke in and robbed and murdered a woman, and when the official book-work is done, you feel sick, and Bill takes you outside...

This punk is still breathing, Tom! Why didn't you finish the job? I'd have killed him!

If it'd been me, I'd have put a bullet in his head...

C'mon! Help me get him to the hospital, Bill. He can't die... not this way. He's got to go through it all... the booking... the indictment... the trial... the conviction. He's got to know... he's got to know all the time he's going to burn!

He's a killer, Doc! He killed the sergeant's wife...

He's a killer, Doc! He killed the sergeant's wife...

I'm sorry! But then... I mean, why?

It's got to be by law, Doc... due process of law.

The next morning, you're back at the hospital... in the prison ward where they've moved Mike Ferris...

You're going to pull through, Mike! You'll be all healed in a couple of weeks. You'll feel like living again. But then we'll come... and we'll take you into court...

The ambulance comes, and you help load Mike Ferris in. You and Bill ride down to the hospital with him. You wait while they work on him. You wait a long time...

Will he make it, Doc? Will he?

I think so! Is he a friend of yours, Sergeant? A relative...?

You look at the bruised and battered and swollen face... and for a moment, a frightening thought hits you...

Bill, there's no chance he won't get the chair, is there?

I don't see how, Tom... unless he dies from the beating...
You sit beside him, hissing your words at him, tormenting him.

They'll find you guilty of murder, Mike! They'll sentence you to die... in the chair! You'll have a few weeks to think it over...

...and I'll come and visit you, Mike. I'll come every day. I'll come... and I'll tell you how it's going to be... and how it's going to feel when they finally turn on the juice.

Bill is there, standing over you, his hand on your shoulder...

Hey, get him out of here, Tom. Why don't you take a little trip somewhere?

No! I've got to be here! I got to tell Mike all about it. I got to see...

It's etched in your mind now, Tom... just how the law you've sworn to uphold is going to exact payment from Mike Fenris. You even whisper it in a good-bye promise to Mary... I'll watch, Mary... and I'll see the switch thrown... smell the odor of his burning flesh... help them dump him into a pine box... watch them drop him into a grave... and then I'll foul up the dirt they cover him with... with spit!

From Mary's graveside, you hurry back to Mike's graveside.

...the prison warden will come and shave your head, Mike, that's so your hair won't interfere with the current from the hood.

You'll have to leave now, Gibson...

You ignore the doctor's request... they'll slit your pants legs so they won't interfere with the electrodes. They're going to strap to your ankles, and in a little while, the warden'll come in...

I don't want to see you around this ward again, Gibson!

The law, Doc! That's what I live by! The law of this state says a murderer's got to die in the chair...

Then, for Pete's sake, let the law take its course. Keep away from him!

He's got to know he's going to die. He's got to die over and over and over the way Mary... sou...
The days pass into weeks, Tom Gibson, and you continue your visits to the prison ward of the hospital, watching for the doctor, sneaking in when he's gone...

I know! I know! Bring me a drink, Gibson!

The warden'll bring it in your last meal, Mike... anything you order. You'll stuff it down, but you won't be able to keep it there. You'll throw it up and you'll smell sour...

Even as the guard pushes you to the door, you call over your shoulder...

Go home, Tom! This isn't doing anybody any good!

They'll strap sponges soaked with salt water to your wrists! They'll even give you a drink. It's supposed to dull your senses, but it never does! You'll know everything that's going on. They'll come and they'll say, "It's time, Mike!"

The brooding obsession that grips your mind has you tottering on the brink of madness, Tom Gibson. Your tortured dreams are an unending repetition of the nagging theme you've gone through during the day.

Every nerve... every particle of flesh burned, Mike... scorched!

You'll even smell your heat, Mike? Big heat!

You'll die, Mike... burned alive by the law!

The moment you enter the hospital that morning, you feel the tense anxious air about the place. Bill comes running down the corridor and you can almost read what's happened on his face...

Bill! Is it Mike Ferris? Yeah! He escaped... five minutes ago... they think he's still in the building...

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Bill is it Mike Ferris? Yeah! He escaped... five minutes ago... they think he's still in the building...
The news leaves you limp... stunned. A moment later you force yourself to run after Bill... catch up with him... gasp an angry question...

How in blazes should I know? He was gone when I got here!

Whose fault was it, Bill? I've got to know! I'll...

Hold it, Mike! No, you don't, Bill! You can't shoot him! He's got to die in the chair! He's got to burn...

You're going to burn, Mike!

You scream at Mike as he dashes down the hospital steps... and you deliberately get between him and Bill so Bill can't shoot...

You're going to burn, Mike!

You know what he did to Mary! He's got to pay for that! He's not going to cheat the law!

Look! There he goes!

Suddenly, there's a maddening kaleidoscope of faces swirling in your twisted brain... scowling, leering, laughing faces. And they're all Mike Ferris... mocking you... tormenting you...

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Mike starts across the tracks to the opposite platform. You want to climb down after him, but Bill holds you in a death grip...

Don't be a fool!

Le'me go! Le'me get him!

You see Mike reach the opposite platform. You see the sudden fear in his face as a rumbling roaring noise grows in the great cavern. You see the steel monster tearing out of the yawning tunnel...

Get back, you idiot...

You see him sprawl across the shining rails. Reaching out... clawing blindly for something to pull himself up. His screams and the scream of wheel on track combine in a single nerve-shattering squall that sets your teeth on edge.

And as the train passes over him, you see the blinding blue sparks...smell the stench of burning flesh...

You see him turn back... hesitate... stumble over his own feet in his awkward desperate attempt to reach safety. You see the wild look of terror on his face as he falls...

You keep staring stupidly at the red ground-up mess that was once a man...

Did he cheat the law, Bill? Did he? Did he?

What difference does it make? Tom!

He's dead! He's dead!

Your voice is high-pitched... almost a shriek...

Well... that... that... choke... saves the State the trouble...

...and I'll never know! I'll never know if he burned on the third rail... or the train got him first! I'll never know!